

CHAPTER VI.

Items of Sculptural and Archaeological Interest.

This ancient Barata Varsha has been famous and pre-eminent in many ways in this world and has been shining like a crest-jewel ever since the dawn of human civilisation. Chief among the causes that contributed to this unique position she has been occupying was the marvellous advance her ancient artistes had made in the field of Archaeology in which India has ever been and is even to this day excelling over other countries. Needless to say that India reached a perfection in these arts, unknown in many other countries and the evidence for the same has been best preserved mostly in our ancient shrines and temples, studded throughout the length and breadth of this holy land. Sculptural and Architectural monuments have been truly considered as "Frozen Music", "Frozen History" or "Lasting Links" that bind the unknown past, with the boundless future. Even in their ruins these mighty monuments and mutilated sculptures of an age gone by, still hold the torch aloft for man's quest after the Light Divine. Among our ancient Shrines and Temples which have been the main centres where these have been preserved to a tolerable degree and are still reputed to be famed for their Sculptural and Architectural beauties, the Temple of Lord Alagar at Thirumalirunjolaimalai occupies a unique position.

There are many items of interest both historical and archaeological in this Temple and its picturesque environments, of which the most important ones alone are noticed below.

This Temple - City consists of two Forts. One, the Fort of Alagapuri which is about 2400 ft by 1200 ft. and the other the Fort of Iranyan or as some style it, the fort of Iravan, both comprising an area of more than 100 acres. The main Temple is situate in the latter or inner Fort. The outer fort had within

its circuit the ancient and famous city of Alagapuri over which Queen Ulupi is stated to have reigned. There is also a tradition that it was Queen Alli or Chitrangadha that ruled in the Alagapuri Fort. This is not probable. Her principal capital was Manalure, otherwise known as Manipura. Needless confusion has been brought upon, in an effort to identify Ulupi with Chitrangadha by scholars. Professor H. H. Wilson refers to Ulupi as the daughter of the Serpent King of Manipura (J. R. A. S. Vol. III Art. IX page 199). Captain Fell opined that the reference to the episode of Chitrangadha as daughter of Malaya Dwaja was an interpolation in the South Indian recensions of the Mahabaratha consequent on the fact that Chitrangadha's father is referred to as Chitravahana else where. He did not, it is stated, feel it safe to identify Malaya Dwaja with Chitravahana. He further felt difficulties in trying to identify Madura with Manipura. Sri. V. Kanakasabhai also has shared in these views.

A careful analysis of the relevant passages in the Mahabaratha will reveal the fact that Chitravahana Pandya having been one of the foremost monarchs of the Pandyan Dynasty had many other names besides this one. Poet Puhazhendi in his immortal poem "Alli Arasani Malai" calls him as Chitrangadha Pandya and states that his daughter Queen Alli married Partha or Arjuna in her twelfth year and bore him a son Babruvahana by name. The Tamil Prose Editions of the Mahabaratha which closely follow the poetic compositions of the work by Nallapillai refers to Chitravahana with other names also such as Meenavan, Vazhudhi - Maran, Gouriyan, Usithan, Koodar-Koman, Thennavan, Panchavan etc. In the Nirnayasagara Press edition of the Mahabaratha one can clearly find that Chitravahana had many names such as Pravira, Malaya Dwaja etc. His capital was Manalure or Manalura Pura. Manalure itself was known as Manipura (ibid). Manalure or Manipura could not be identified with Madura, they being distinct Pandyan Capitals at far distant periods. Manalure was Chitravahana's Capital as well

as that of his famous daughter Queen Chitrangadha or as she was more popularly known as Queen Alli (Adhi Parva 63 - 81, 235 - 17) Chitrangadha had another Capital by name Allinagar. It was near the precincts of Manalure, that Arjuna was engaged in battle with his own son Babruvahana Chitrangadha's son and became worsted by him when he visited this City once again when he followed his brother's Asvamedha Horse (Asvamedha Parva - 79) Sahadeva also has visited this Manalure when engaged in the military exploits connected with the Rajasuya Dig Vijayam of his brother. Babruvahana was considered as the 'son' of Chitravahana, his maternal grand father, by the Putrika - Putra - Dharma Nyaya. This Pravira or Chitravahana or Malayadwaja was killed in the battle at Hastinapura by Aswathama (Karna Parva Ch. 56 - 1 to 44) after a most thrilling contest. While Kauravya was the name of Ulupi's father and Iravan was the name of her son through Arjuna whom she has married (Adhi Parva 234-35), it is difficult to understand why should any occasion have arisen for trying to identify Ulupi with Chitrangadha and land oneself in consequent complexities?. It may be also noted that for the great function at the Aswamedha Sacrifice at Hastinapura, Babruvahana goes there along with his mothers Chitrangadha or Alli and Ulupi, the Naga Queen. (Asvamedha Parva Ch. 89).

The tradition that the Naga princess reigned at Alagar Hills is highly probable from the fact that Alagar Hills is one of the favourite places of Naga worship as evidenced by the hundreds of Nagas, in the Naganathar Temple there. In the Naganathar Temple at the Madhavee Mandapam high up in the Hills, one can see to this day Nagas chiselled on the rocky face of the Hill itself. That Queen Ulupi was a Malabar lass or a Naga princess and "belonged to a land near the Pandya country" as opined by scholars is confirmed by the fact that the Chera Kingdom was during this time a most powerful and extensive kingdom.

We have come across, in the various histories of our land with glowing descriptions of the Great Forts and fortified cities in our ancient land. Many of them are now no more. Even the historic Forts of Tanjore, Trichinopoly and Madura etc., though they belong to our present millennium are now no more. Razed to the ground and with no substantial historic remnants to remind us of our past mighty prowess, they all stand obliterated. Fortunately and providentially there yet stands the fort of Alagapuri guarding within its mystic enclosure Lord Alagar's shrine. It is surely the hand of divinity that has chosen yet to preserve the Fort of Alagapuri at once historic, romantic and picturesque. The remnants of the various fortresses, fort-alices, bastions and the high and mighty ramparts with impregnable battlements built with unscrutable contrivances, and designs make one's imagination reel with the thoughts as to how our ancients had designed their organisations both defensive and offensive. In the absence of these informations from our histories we have naturally to seek them from our classics like Silappadigaram, Jeevaka Chinthamani and other works. These give certain details of our ancient defensive and offensive weapons, which must be applicable to Alagapuri Fort also, since from Sri Periyalwar's time (B. C. 3055), it was a fortified city, as already noticed. Silappadigaram (XV 207—216) and Jeevaka Chinthamani a Jaina Work, (1 St. 101—104) give a detailed description of the ancient missiles of war as obtained during the reign of Nedunchezhan and his succeeding Pandyan monarchs. They were as follows :—

Mechanical tigers, monkeys, big storks, angry owls, elephants, and angry looking snakes that swallowed men, eagles that looked like Yama, pigs, swans that spat fire, cruel horses that of themselves charged the enemy, bows that shot their own arrows, fowls that pecked at the assailants, angling rods, slings that vomitted stones, thin ropes that cut off heads, machines that threw out stones, spears, arrows, and resembling human statues;

beams which crushed heads; beams so arranged as to fall on those that would force open the gate; machines that poured and shattered all around boiling copper, boiling steel, boiling oil; the hundred killer, machines for throwing down and beating people; visible demons; swords that went on killing the foe; burning balls of iron; carts that were propelled by machinery; engines like the black-fingered monkeys for biting foes; missiles such as spears, lances, iron forks, stakes, chains, bundles of arrows etc.

Both the Alagapuri and Hiranyan forts are surrounded by strong, massive, broad and high walls with a number of battlements, and fortalices which are still strong and in good condition in many places. The walls of both the forts form a very interesting piece of study. The ravaging hand of time has not been harshly laid upon the ancient walls of Queen Ulupi's city though more than 5000 years have now gone by. After a scrutiny of the construction of the fort walls of both the inner and outer forts, Sir James Grigg until recently finance Member to the Government of India, and who some time ago visited this institution said that the zig zag way in which the stones were dressed for the construction of the walls of the fort and the aspect of its battlements reminded him of similar structures in the ruined fort walls of Troy and other contemporary cities.

There are four main gates to this temple. The chief and most important of which is the Stone Gateway in the South Fort Wall. Entering the fort through this gate and passing through the picturesque Central Main Road flanked by beautiful avenues, the visitor will notice on his left at its northern end, a most wonderful structure, a protected monument, going by the name of Thirumalai Nayakkar Mandapam. It is a magnificent building in which we could see the statues of Thirumalai Nayak and his Queen and his brother Muthalu Naick (the second in the government) and his consort, wrought on two opposite pillars, which are admirable pieces of work that should be preserved for the nation.

The full life-size statue of Thirumalai Nayak in this Mandapam is considered to be the finest, the grandest and the most life like one so far found available or extant though there are many available ones even in the Prakara of this very temple as well as at Madura, Srivilliputtur and Thirupparangundram. Every one of these is fashioned by a master of the art. The name of the Phydias that was responsible for these magnificent statues is stated to be Thirumala's Royal Sculptor and Architect, Sumantra Moorthi. As one author puts it "even the fair round belly for which he was notorious is realistically and unflatteringly depicted" in these Thirumala's Statues. The description of Thirumalai Nayak by Father H. Heras in Q. J. M. S. XV. 209 - 218 excerpted below is most faithfully and exactly illustrated in the Statue at Alagar Hills. "Thirumala is shown here as the heir of all the bodily characteristic of the Nayak family, but all these qualities are developed in him in an extraordinary manner, as showing practically that all the good qualities of his ancestors were combined in him and carried to a supreme degree of perfection. His broad jaw, his powerful shoulders, his tremendous hips, his strong gigantic legs, and even his protuberent abdomen bulging out over the belt, are some of those features which we may see in almost all the preceeding statues, are here carried out to an extreme degree of development. These bodily characteristics in the Statue of Thirumala are but a manifestation of the spiritual qualities inherited also from his forefathers." The building wherein these are housed is in a ruined condition and is engaging the attention of the Devasthanam at renovation. Just opposite the Nayakkar Mandapam and west of the Big Car Stand and Mandapam one could stroll along the vast and spacious Palace of the Nayaks with its high domes and vaulted structures now in the last stages of crumbling ruination. Even in its ruined condition the palace reminds one of the great and vanished might and glory of the Nayak Kings of yore. A walk through and round the cloisters and halls of these vanishing structures is thrilling and thought provoking to a degree, a thing more fit for

experience than for description. From Alagapuri Fort there are two entrances to the inner fort, that of Raya Gopuram and the Iravan or Hiranyan Fort Gate.

Car Stand and Mandapam with its gorgeous Car.

Opposite the Palace on the eastern side of the central street there is the Car Stand with its "gorgeous Car". Here once stood the "Amaitha Narayanan Car" referred to in M. E. R. (13, 14, 15/32).

Of the three Gopurams of note in this temple, "Raya Gopuram," "Padinettampadi Gopuram" and "Thondaman Gopuram" (M. E. R. 306, 331'30) each has a special note of interest. Raya Gopuram having a historical importance and the Padinettampadi Gopuram having a religious importance and the Thondaman Gopuram the reminiscence of a Bakta's devotion.

The Iravan or Hiranyan Fort Gate.

This is reputed to have been once a grand entrance. Until about a year or two ago, it was completely dilapidated but is now renovated to afford a safe passage to the inner areas.

Raya Gopuram.

Some attribute the construction of this Raya Gopuram to Thirumalai Nayak. According to the Mruthyunjaya Manuscripts 64 such Gopurams are said to have been commenced. But according to the History of the Carnatic Governors, 96 such Gopurams are said to have been commenced. The Raya Gopuram here is in an utterly dilapidated condition. Seeing that it was in a dangerous condition the passage is now closed for traffic. But it is well worth a visit on account of its splendid accumulations of excellent stone carvings and its historic connections. Rama Raja Maharaja, and Thirumalai Deva Maharaja are stated to have begun the construction of these many Gopurams. None of which was ever completed. Scholars are not agreed as to the probable or possible reasons for the abandonment of the works in

their half finished condition. Even in their present condition these Gopurams are worth preserving. All these have been laid out on a grand and mighty plan, almost all similar in design but for their varying sizes. Such Gopurams are even to this day found at Madura, Srirangam, Chidambaram and various other places. But none can vie with the height, size and grandeur and the fine carvings of the imposing structure at Sri Alagar Hills. One can to this day see its massive pillars and stately gateways standing to a height of about 50 ft and over. The construction of these Gopurams have been regular feats of engineering, commanding the admiration of the world for centuries and centuries. Other noteworthy features about this Gopuram are, the engravings and inscriptions there at carved in Grantha and Tamil. The pillar door-post on the western side of the entrance a monolith some 50' X 3' bears the Royal emblem and insignia of the Vijayanagar dynasty. One can clearly note with interest the Boar (Varaha), Conch, Chakra, Crescent and the Sword—all emblems of the Vijayanagar Kingdom. There is one other ancient shrine where the emblem of Vijayanagar Royal House is found engraved. This is in North Thiruppathi. But the engraving there is neither clear nor very distinct and complete as it is in the Sri Alagar Hills. Here the engravings are more instructive. Just on the opposite pillar there is engraved the crescent Moon to show the lunar dynastic descent of the Vijayanagar kings and beneath which is an inscription of the year 1546 A. D. giving the names of the various kings of the Aravidu Dynasty-M. E. R. 93/29.

Yanai Vahana Mandapam.

Originally this must have been one of the most popular Sannadhis of the city. It might have been even the Sangam mentioned Bala Deva's or Krishna's shrine or some other equally venerated shrine. It is a lofty structure, full of excellently carved pillars and statues and attractive friezes depicting the Leelas and Avatars of Sri Maha Vishnu supported on rows of colonnades.

The premises of this Shrine are now used for the Mandagappadi of the Lord during the Yanai Vahana Seva of the Brahmotsavam.

Passing the Yanai Vahana Mandapam, one approaches the Sri Padinettampadi Sannadhi. The visitor makes his obeisance there to Sri Padinettampadian and his Gopura. In Sri Godha Parinaya, Sri Godha when approaching this temple is said to have been deeply touched by the admirable beauty of this Padinettampadi Gopuram. From this it appears that the existence of the Gopuram is more ancient than Sri Godha's time. Sri Periyalwar when he takes his daughter, Sri Godha to Sri Alagar Hills and when he had just neared the Temple addresses his daughter in a deeply devotional and reverential manner as already referred to at page 75 supra. It is clear from the excerpt from the Godha Parinaya (page 75) in what high esteem were the "18 steps" and the high, lofty and beautiful Gopuram was held and with what deep veneration and piety and fear Sri Periyalwar enjoins upon his daughter Sri Godha to perform the profoundest pranamams towards this shrine even with her head touching the ground. Note every word of his injunction and command "कुरु शिरसा प्रणि पातम्" Another noteworthy feature was that the Temple was stated to have been entered not by the Padinettampadi Gopura Dwara but through another entrance, (विलङ्घ्य गोपुरद्वारम्) opposite to which is reputed to be the Pushkarani of the Temple of Subramania which tradition says now lies buried underground and on the south of the Pushkarani.

Access to the Temple is then had through the entrance called Vandivasal situate to the north of Sri Padinettampadi and west of the ancient entrance to Hills. Entering this Vandivasal the visitor finds himself in the place called Yathirajan Thirumuttam—a spacious quadrangle of 300 X 150 ft.

Sri Rama and Sri Lakshmana Graneries.

In the Yathirajan square on the northern side of it two ancient dome-topped structures reminiscent of Budhistic architecture

and of a very peculiar design and workmanship are noticed. These are stated to be the ancient granaries of the Temple. Both had fallen into ruins. After necessary renovations both have been converted into reservoirs for storing water for the inhabitants of the Temple and fort areas.

Kodai Thirunal Mandapam.

This is situated on the southern side of the Yathirajan Square and just west of the back portion of the Padinettampadi Gopuram. The first three days of the Chaitrothsavam is performed here. On ordinary days, it is converted into a choultry for the pilgrims' stay.

Sri Manavalamamuni Sannadhi.

This is situated west of the Kodai Thirunal Mandapam. Since the Garbhagraham has fallen into ruins and decay the idols have been removed to the inside of the temple and housed along with the Alwars. West of the Manavalamamuni Sannadhi are the Sannadhis of Sri Udayavar and Sri Thirukachchi Nambi.

Kalyana Mandapam.

In this quadrangle and joined to the Thondaman Gopuram of the temple is one of the most ancient and magnificent pieces of architecture the visitor has ever met. It is the famous Kalyana Mandapam of the Nayak period as may be seen from the style and technique of the sculptures. The two statues at the eastern side at the entrance to this three aisled Mandapam, flanked by verandahs on either side and supported by artistic colonnades, represent the Kings that were responsible for the construction of this grand edifice. They are supposed to be Krishnappa or Periya Veerappa and Visvanatha II (Brothers and joint Kings 1573 - 1595). The sculptural beauty one meets with there is unrivalled and unsurpassed, which for boldness of design and fineness of execution have few equals or rivals, but for a few other similar works in the temple of Sri Meenakshi at

Madura. These monolithic works executed with the greatest artistic skill is an admiration even for the most carping critic. The two aspects of Sri Nrisimhavathara, Sri Krishna, Sri Garudaruda Vishnu, Rati and Manmatha, Sri Trivikrama, Sri Lakshmi-Varaha, all full size representations are simply marvellous and seem to be divinely inspired. For delicacy of detail and exuberance of decoration, and fancy's freedom to which the Alagapuri Phydias has given the fullest play in these statues and alto-relievos, it would be indeed difficult to find parallels. Almost every 'Rasa' is here represented. The refined grace with which Sringara is depicted in Manmatha and Rati, the terrible Raudra and the awe inspiring Veera depicted in both the statues of Sri Nrisimha and the soul curdling Bayanaka and Bibatsa depicted in the face and frame of Hiranyakasipu, the marvellous nature of the Adhbutha in the statue of Trivikrama Avatara, the benevolence or the Karuna in the face of the Viswaroop Krishna's statue, the Vatsalya portrayed in Lakshmi-Varaha and the serene Santi and the deeply devotional posture of humility of Sri Anjaneya depicting a selfless Bakti are all items each worth a study by itself. In every idol you can meet the vandal's hand at work. But such a fate was inevitable in the peculiar conditions of our history. Such special Kalyana Mandapams are very rare and are to be met with, in a few great ancient shrines only. Velure in the North Arcot District can boast of a fine Kalyana Mandapam where also the South Indian Sculptor has exhibited the cunning of his hand. The sculptures there also are said to be of a marvellous nature. It is said that the East India Company contemplated the careful removal of the Mandapam in parts and parcels to be re-erected at Brighton in England under the ægis of the then Prince Regent. But the vessel which was to have carried this Sacred Treasure to the English shores is stated to have foundered in the sea and the design consequently abandoned.

Thondaman Gopuram.

This is next entered from the Nayakkar Kalyana Mahal. This Gopuram with the grand Dwarapalakas of peculiar workmanship is reputed to have been constructed by Thondamanar son of Kalingaroyar of Seluvattur whose figure is sculptured in one of the Pillars in the Mandapam. Its age is difficult to be fixed. (M. E. R. 331 of 29). But it must certainly have been prior to the Nayak Dynasty when the later Kalyana Mandapam was built. Being the central and main Gopuram its date must have been during the early Pandyan period. Though the origin of the construction of the temple is ascribed to the mystic past, recorded evidence shows that the temple was renovated from the Upana to the Stupi by Tiruvalan Somayajee under the orders of Mahabali Urangavillidasa Banadhiraja in the year 1464 A.D. (M. E. R. 307/30). There have also been subsequent periodical renovations.

After entering the Thondaman Gopuram one approaches the famous Golden Flag Staff beneath which local tradition says untold treasures lie buried. This is the third Prakaram of the temple.

Alwar Sannadhi Mandapam.

Just turning to the left we enter this Mandapam. In this corridor there are four noteworthy statues that have a peculiar fascination for the scholar and the connoisseur. The first and the fourth statues seem to be wearing some Yagnopavitham. The Panchakachcham, the Pavitramala, the Tengalai Thiruman and their short ear - rings are their distinguishing features. The next statue, the one on the left hand side of the entrance to the Alwar Sannadhi, seems to be that of some distinguished personage probably a royal one as seen from the Veera Srinkala, the Noopura (anklet), the bracelets, and the necklace with the pendant or Padaackam, besides the tell - tale dagger tucked up in the belt. The head gear resembles the "Thopparam" worn by the Kandhadai Sathadha Sri Vaishnavas that perform the Thiru-

meni Kaval Kainkaryam. This head gear almost resembles the Arayar's Prapannabaga but it does not hide the ears which the latter does. This statue is 5'5" and stands on a pedestal of 1'8" and the whole is sculptured in one single piece of granite 9'x3½'x1½'. The statue that stands third from the right side of the entrance to the Sri Alwar Sannadhi stands full 5'5" and is similar in size and dimensions to the second one and represents a Lingayat devotee. The devotee that has a statue put up for him could have been no ordinary personage. His Veera Srinkala, the bracelets, the armlets, with fingers profusely ornamented with finger rings and the dagger hanging in his belt and peculiar head dress all show him to be some royal personage or a person of rank and distinction who must at the same time have been either a munificent donor to this shrine or must have been connected with some great and substantial Thiruppani or at least renovation. The problem of the presence of the statue of this Lingayat with his Tripundram, Thilakam and Rudraksha Mala besides the necklace with the Lingam pendant hanging on his chest and with ear rings of Rudraksha beads all demonstrating a strong Saivite leaning in this orthodox Vaishnavite shrine, is an intriguing one. Lingayats are stated to be staunch Saivites, orthodox in their faith and rather intolerant of Vaishnavism. While so, how could the presence of the statue of a Lingayat, who evidently must have been a most ardent devotee at this Hill Shrine, be satisfactorily explained? Moreover, the very place, situation and order in which these statues are placed appear to be so inappropriate and out of place that makes one think that these pillars and statues have been purposely taken away or removed from a more prominent place and relegated to an unimportant or less prominent quarter. Some critics place very much reliance upon these points in support of their theory that this Hill Shrine was at one time a great Saivite or Subramanya Sthala. Any how this is a problem for scholars of research to solve.

Mettu Krishnan Koil.

What is now called the Mettu Krishnan Koil (M. E. R. 84 of 29) was constructed originally by Sundara Pandya Deva. The Mandapam in front is called "Koyil Pon Meinda Perumal Thiru Mandapam" which means that this Mandapam was constructed by Sundara Pandya who was responsible for gilding and plating the temple with gold through out. Evidence of such Gold platings of even the floorings here has been in abundance until lately, in such places as the Aryan Mandapam and even now there are traces of this gold platings. This Sundara Pandya Deva has constructed a similar gold plated Mandapam at Sri-rengam. He has also installed at Srirengam an idol called "Pon Meinda Perumal" and his consort "Sera Kula Valli". He constructed there Alagiya Manavalan Mandapam, and Thirumuttin Pandal etc and plated these with gold.

After the construction of this Sundara Pandya Mandapam it became the chief Uthsava Mandapam where from, the decorated deity always started in procession. Here it was that the famous Kulasekharan Pandal or canopy was installed and Chedirayan Peetam (M. E. R. 320/'30) constructed for the deity to be seated during the Thirukkalyanam. The celebration of the Thirukkalyanam here, is referred to in an inscription at Tadikombu Temple also (M. E. R. 3 of '94).

Aryan Mandapam.

Crossing the main aisle and the Golden Dwajasthamba the visitor enters the famous Aryan Mandapam that was once fully plated with gold. As soon as the flight of steps to the Aryan Mandapam is ascended, one faces atonce the marvellously carved and chiselled stone pillars, all monoliths and some of them scooped out to represent smaller encircling pillars within its circuit, exhibiting carvings of Yalis with rolling balls of stones inside their mouths. The Subramanya and Nrisimha and other figures carved in the pillars exhibit the utmost fastidious-

ness of the Sculptor. The roofing of this Aryan Mandapam is unusually fine. The wide stone eaves of this grand and imposing Mandapam are made of huge blocks of granite some of them several feet long with proportionate breadth. The upper sides of these eaves are so fashioned as to exhibit a graceful double curve while the lower portions disclose some of the finest carvings representing long, thin, wooden rafters as they were, radiating as if from a central point above the building and strengthened by purlins executed in complete relief. Similar eaves surround the porch of the Mettu Krishnan Koil. These must have occupied the unknown Phydias an expense of time and energy that must have been very great. If a parallel to these fine works has to be seen, one can see it in the Sri Subramanya Shrine at Sri Brahadeswara Temple at Tanjore. This Aryan Mandapam is a very ancient structure containing a wealth of inscriptions in "Vatteluthu" "Grantha" and "Tamil" and "Tamil" of the early Pandya, Raja Raja Ist and other Cholas and later Pandyas as well. Its age is surmised to be of the 6th or 7th Century A. D. It appears to have been built or renovated by Raghava Raja son of Thomarasyya (M. E. R. 83 of '28) and he called it Padiyetha Mandapam. Raghava Raja's figure sculptured on the right hand side of the entrance to the Padiyetha Mandapam stands in good relief and is worth seeing. This Padiyetha Mandapam has become to be subsequently known also as Aryan Mandapam. Though Raghava Raja has constructed this Aryan Mandapam, various other devotees also seem to have helped in its construction. This is evidenced by the inscription in the various pillars which have been given by various devout individuals, whose names are noted in the donated pillars (M. E. R. 5 of '31, and 314 of '30).

Munayadaraiyan Thirumandapam.

From the Aryan Mandapam one enters the Maha Mandapam or Koil Alangaran Thirumandapam and which was also called Munayadaraiyan Thirumandapam after the name of the

donor who constructed the same. Ponparri Udayan Monnai Piran Viradamudithaperumal Munayadaraiyan seems to have been his full name. The title "Munayadaraiyan" seems to have a regal connection. The Temple of Kapileswaram at the foot of the Kapila Thirtham Hill at Thiruppathi owes its origin to a Prince Rajendra Chola Brahma Marayan Munayadaraiyan (M. E. R. 270 and 291 of 1930 etc). The entrance to the Munaiyadaraiyan Mandapam is known as "Aryan Vasal". Probably it was guarded by the warriors from the north in the same manner as the Goorka Guards are now a days engaged in places that need special, careful and efficient watching. The Chola King also had a special fancy for the Arya-Padais or Aryan Battalions. Just as in modern days, cantonments for the military are established near capital cities, in the Chola period also the kings had such cantonments near their capitals; and unlike the present cantonments the ancient ones were known by the class of the military that occupied the cantonments. For example, the Arya Padaiyure near Chola Maligai (Kumbakonam) the Chola capital, was the cantonment of the Aryan Battalion. Similarly there were other classes of Battalions occupying cantonments in other surrounding quarters around Chola Maligai, like Pompappadaiyure, Puduppadaiyure, Manalpadaiyure etc. Padaiyure means a military cantoment. The name Arya (Battal) Padai Vasal or entrance in the Srengam Temple must have had a similar origin. From the Koil Olugu it is seen that the Aryabattal Vasal has been in existence since Kali 360.

From the Munaiyadaraiyan Thirumandapam one enters the second Prakaram of this Temple in which there is a raised platform 3 ft. above the yard that surrounds the central shrine. At a place marked with a brass plate in the northern wing one can have a splendid Darsan of the Golden Sri Somachchanda Vimanam. In the Munaiyadaraiyan Mandapam, at the entrance to the central shrine can be seen the huge bronze Dwar-Palakas of exquisite beauty and workmanship.

Nangal Kunram Prakaram.

The Nam Kunram or Nangal Kunram Prakaram, so named from the fact, as tradition has it, that all the Gods clustered around Sri Sundararaja in this Kunram and in this space for perpetual presence and Darsan and each claiming this Kunram as "My Kunram" and so on, is reached after passing through the Maha Mandapam and Ardhmandapam and is Pranavakara in shape circling around the central Sannadhi. The circular apse is quite an uncommon one. This Prakaram has many windows of artistically wrought stone trellis works of various designs.

Sri Somachchanda Vimanam.

This is stated in the Puranas to have been constructed by Visvakarma himself in the shape or Akara of the Moon. The meaning of the expression Somachchanda is "beautiful like the moon". (சந்தம் - அழகு). The Darsan of the Somachchanda Vimanam and the Paravasudevar in the Vimana is one of the rarest and most magnificent ones the devout pilgrim should not miss to have in his Yatras. The architecture of the central shrine is of the Vesāra Type. The shrine is circular. The Prakaram is circular. The origin of this portion of the shrine is in the mythical past. For a clear Darsan of the Vimana one would have to go up the terrace, through the terrace door, the key of which will be with the watchman on duty at the Golden Flag Staff.

Vasanta Mandapam.

After finishing a round along the Mandapams enumerated above, the visitor should not fail to see the ancient Vasanta Mandapam which became ruined some years ago and which has now been renovated recently and where except on the Vasantha festival days, Sri Sundararaja Gurukula is run. In this antique building a small island-like building is situated for seating the Lord and for flooding the surrounding depth of the tank-like construction with water all around for a cool Darsan in the Vasanta Rithu.

Alagiya Manavalan Thirumandapam.

From M. E. R. 306 of '30, it appears that there was such a Mandapam here. But this could not now be identified. It is worthy of note that in Srirangam, Emperor Hari Hara II of Vijayanagar had constructed a Mandapam called Alagiya Manavalan Thirumandapam and installed an ivory Thiruppallikkattil and Mancham. It is therefore not unlikely that the Mandapam of this same name at Alagar Hills might have been constructed by the Emperor Hari Hara himself. It might also be possible that the same Hari Hara was responsible for the famous ivory Vimanam etc., here.

The Malaikkinar.

Right in front of the Sannadhi of Sri Godha or Sri Bhoo-devi (Sri Godha was but an incarnation of Sri Boodevi in this Kali), there is a beautiful stone well (now unfortunately filled up with earth) that still goes by the name of Malai-kinar. Tradition has it that in the interior portions of this well an idol of Sri Bhoo-devi of exquisite beauty has been installed in ancient ages and that it was customary in this temple to have all the Nirmalya Garlands and Flowers of the Sannadhi consigned to the care of Sri Bhoo-devi in this well. For, it is but appropriate that Sri Bhoo-devi as the consort of the Lord should get back the flowers that she generated and gave to the Lord as "Soodi-kodutha Nachiyar" and one cannot also miss the mystic significance of this Malai-Kinar existing right in front of the Sannadhi of Sri Soodi-kudutha Nachiyar herself at Sri Alagar Hills. Another noteworthy feature is that Sri Ramanuja who was also known as Koil Annan (which means that he was the spiritual brother of Sri Andal and so styled in recognition of his services of fulfilling Sri Andal's vow of offering hundred Thadas of Akkaravadisal to Lord Alagar in times gone by) and who was an ardent devotee of Sri Andal or Sri Boodevi, seems to have set up similarly an image of Sri Bhoo-devi at North Thiruppathi Temple also in a well constructed there, for the purpose of the consignment of the Nirmalya Flowers.

In front of the Malai-kinar and facing Sri Godha, stand the statues of the Brother Kings appearing to be the same that adorn the Kalyana Mandapam, and supposed to be Krishnappa alias Periyaveerappa and Visvanatha II (1573 to 1595 A. D.) Each has an anklet in his right leg, one bracelet in his right hand, 5 in the left hand, and 3 armlets in the right hand. They wear ear-rings of Rudraksha beads and Rudrakshamalas also. Their head-gears resemble those of the Vijayanagar sovereigns.

Madhavee Mandapam.

It is evidently so called because of the flowers of the sacred Madhavee creeper (மல்லிகை) overhanging this Mandapam once. These Madhavee Mandapams must have been very popular ones in those ancient ages. Poet Kalidasa refers to one such in his Meghasandesa II. 15 (प्रत्यासन्नो कुरबकवृतेर्माधवी मण्डपस्य) This is a very ancient structure, and one constantly referred to in the early works such as the Stalapuranam etc. The indecipherable inscriptions and the various statues and alto relievos point to a very early age when this could have been constructed. Needless to say that even what we now see there cannot but be merely later renovations during the Pandya and Nayak dynasty some of whose statues adorn this place now. The sacredness of the place is buried in the mystery of the past.

The Temple Wooden Carvings.

Not hours, but days it would require for studying the grace and beauty of the exceedingly wonderful carvings in wood one is fortunate enough to meet with in this Temple. Some old door frames containing some of the best carvings are now carefully preserved in the Museum. The two massive main entrance doors in the Thondaman Gopuram covering a gateway of some 9' x 18', have some of the most exquisite and delicate carvings known in these parts. These doors are very old, probably a thousand years in age. They represent scenes some

hundreds in number depicting the various aspects, Avatars, Leelas or episodes of both Siva and Vishnu without any the least distinction. They are all executed with the greatest artistic skill. Scholars are of opinion that these are some of the rarest and most beautiful carvings in wood that they have ever met with.

Mural Paintings in the Vasantha Mandapam.

When visiting the Vasantha Mandapam, one should not also miss to see the beautiful fresco paintings in colour of various scenes from the Ramayana and various scenes from the Mahabharatha in the ceilings and portions of the walls of this structure around the four Cloistral walks surrounding the central Mandapam and in the central mandapam also. They speak of the dexterity of the artist of centuries now gone by.

Other items of importance.

The Kanu Mandapam and the Tandalai Kovil ruins are seen on the way to Sri Noopura Ganga, after a bath in the Narayana Vapi. The next Thirtham and spring to be visited is the Hanumar Thirtham and shrine and then the Garuda Thirtham and shrine. Then we pass by the Sola Malai Mandapam on our left side to the Noopur Ganga at the Madhavee Mandapam. The scenery here is simply charming and bewitching. It is one of the finest beauty spots in South India. When once the devotee or pilgrim or the traveller goes there he forgets himself practically enchanted by the environments. He is loath to depart and return back. This is a thing for actual experience and enjoyment. Description is bound to be absolutely inadequate. Owing to the existence of the wild beasts like the hyena, the bison, the porcupine, etc., people would not stay there in the nights. Now the building that was thoroughly dilapidated has been completely renovated and kept protected with bars of iron so that those who want to stay there in the nights also can conveniently stay. A kitchen room also is constructed for the convenience of the pilgrims.

Pancha Pandavar Padukkai.

Students of History and Archaeology will not rest content when on a visit to Sri Alagar if they do not visit the famous Pancha Pandavar cave in the Hills about half a mile east of the Temple through a steep and dangerous ascent, with no beaten track to trace his way; for, in some places he would have to walk on an apology for a foot path, in another he would have to fix his weary legs on a tottering iron foot ladder provided by the Government, in certain places walking over a slippery boulder smooth and sleeky, and in other places often lying down and crawling like a crab through a small crevice in the rock; for, the short hight of the place here will not enable one to walk erect; after all these, one will finally reach a haven of safety with a cool spring filled with ambrosial water, beneath the shades of a bulky banyan tree and disclosing a big cavern. Seated in the cave one can see the world spread out before one with all its charm and glory. The verdant valleys below, the bright and beaming sun, the cool zephyr all enveloped as it were within the blue expansive canophy of the skies, make one feel as if one is put in tune with the infinite. This cavern has a small hall inside and a number of stone beds of different sizes from 6 to 9 ft. in length and from 2 to 3 ft. in breadth. The Brahmi inscriptions of the 3rd century B. C. and the quaint figures engraved thereon will murmur to the interested student what part the Jain and the Buddhist monks have been playing in these parts in those remote ages. One may notice there, an image engraved in a Siddhasana posture. It is stated that it is noted in the inscription there that it was the work of the famous Ajjanandhi (referred to in the Jivaka Chintamani also) the great South Indian Jaina teacher of repute and widely known in many Jaina centres like Anamali, Aivarmalai, Uthamapalayam etc.

Just above this cavern, on a big boulder, there is an interesting inscription in Brahmi characters also supposed to be of the 3rd century B. C. The inscription is highly import-

ant in that it is considered to be one of the earliest inscriptions of the Tamil Nad. The fact of the cavern having been made what it was and of the Spring having been properly laid out, was all due to the charity of one Tara Ani and Sri Kara Maran whose names are noted there. Two other names are deciphered by the Epigraphists as Vanigan Nedumaran and Vanigan Ulanathan who are supposed by scholars to have been the occupants of the Cave. These early Buddhists were very particular in the selection of the spots for their Tapasya. Compare the following description of a cave at Mahintala similar to the above hill cave which Rhys Davids gives at pp. 230 and 231 of his work on Buddhism:- "Here on this precipitous western side of the hill, under a large mass of granite rock at a spot which, completely shut out from the world affords a magnificent view of the plains below, he (Mahinda, Asoka's son) had his study hollowed out and steps cut in the rock by which alone it could be reached. There also the stone couch which was carved out of the solid rock, still exists with holes either for curtain rods or for a protecting balustrade beside it. The great rock effectively protects the cave from the heat of the sun, in whose warm light the broad valley below is basking. Not a sound reaches it from the plain, now one far-reaching forest, but then full of busy homesteads.....I shall not easily forget the day when I first entered that lonely cool and quite chamber so simple, and yet so beautiful where more than 2000 thousands years ago the great teacher of Ceylon had sat and taught and worked through the long years of his peaceful and useful life". How exact in almost every detail is this Ceylon cave with the cave of these Hills! One is almost tempted to exclaim in wonder and surprise, "could it have been that Mahinda himself on his way to Ceylon halted here and constructed this cave and later constructed the Mahintala cave after this model?"

Renovations and Thiruppanis.

These have been done constantly by the devotees of the Lord, from kings to peasants. Jatavarman Kulasekara, Jata-

house or a mansion buzzing with life of the members of a once happy house-hold. He may come across with a pestle or a mortar or a grinding stone which an householder, fleeing for his life from a murderous invader, would have found useless and difficult to carry. If the visitor is more fortunate, vessels and utensils or trinkets and jewels and coins too may be his lot to pick up. He can pick up also cannon balls that have been available in decent numbers. Here and there he will meet with stumps of pillars and ruined shrines and temples mutely murmuring their tale of woe. Who knows that there may not be treasures of art and civilization and knowledge underneath these mounds and ruins richer and more glorious and instructive than those of a Luxar or a Mohanjo Daro, or a Harappa (Hara Pada). For these are the ruins of a city that once was the capital of Queen Ulupi and then of the Pandia, Nayak and various other dynasties.
